

Merritt Parkway, Old Stamford Road/Route 106 Bridge  
(Stamford Avenue Bridge)  
Spanning Old Stamford Road/Route 106 at the  
13.2 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway at exit 36  
New Canaan  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-82

HAER  
CONN  
1-NECA,  
8-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

## **HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**

**Merritt Parkway, Old Stamford Road/Route 106 Bridge**  
(Stamford Avenue Bridge)

HAER No. CT-82

**Location:** Spanning Old Stamford Road/Route 106 at the 13.2 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in New Canaan, Fairfield County, Connecticut at exit 36

UTM: 18.625950.4552630  
Quad: Norwalk South, Connecticut

**Construction Date:** 1939

**Engineer:** Connecticut Highway Department

**Architect:** George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

**Contractor:** Paul Bacco Construction Company  
Stamford, Connecticut

**Present Owner:** Connecticut Department of Transportation  
Wethersfield, Connecticut

**Present Use:** Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross Old Stamford Road/Route 106

**Significance:** The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

**Historians:** Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian  
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer  
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

## LOCAL HISTORY

In 1684 John Finch of Stamford received the first grant of land in present-day New Canaan. Few others followed immediately. In 1700, Samuel Smith, Thomas Benedict and Thomas Seymour, each received a forty-four acres of land on Canoe Hill from the town of Norwalk. This area steadily expanded over the next thirty years. In 1731, Connecticut's General Assembly established Canaan Parish out of parts of northwestern Norwalk and northeastern Stamford. The region's civil status was unchanged, but residents were allowed to form their own church.<sup>1</sup>

For the next fifty years the Canaan Parish steadily developed into a farming region, but after the Revolutionary War when agricultural prices fell, local farmers were forced to search for an alternative economy. This resulted in the dramatic expansion of the shoe-making industry. As this trade developed, residents viewed civic control by Norwalk and Stamford as a hinderance. In 1796, community leaders petitioned the General Assembly for independent status. The town of New Canaan was created in 1801; renamed because Canaan, CT had been incorporated in 1739.<sup>2</sup>

As New Canaan continued to develop around the expanding shoe industry, a center village formed with six distinct districts on the periphery: Oenoke Ridge, Ponus Ridge, Silvermine, Smith Ridge, Talmadge Hill, and West Road.

---

<sup>1</sup>"Important Dates in the History of New Canaan," (Pamphlet, New Canaan Historical Society, 1976).

<sup>2</sup>Mary Louise King, The Making of Main Street, (New Canaan: New Canaan Historical Society, 1971), 5-7.

The building of the railroad in 1868 failed to bring new enterprises but the economy was enriched by the coming of the summer boarder, once again giving employment to whole families. Concurrently a new business grew, the buying and selling of real estate. Old farm-houses were remodeled and new mansions built for summer sojourners, many of whom became year-round residents, commuting to New York and nearby cities to work.<sup>3</sup>

Because of its central location, Warren Creamer, the Merritt Highway project engineer of surveys and property acquisition, opened his main field office in New Canaan in 1931. Most local residents favored the Merritt Parkway going through New Canaan, but conflict arose over where the roadway would be located. Originally it was to take a northern route, but the town of Wilton objected to having the parkway, forcing the Merritt to go through the southern districts of Ponus Ridge, Talmadge Hill, and Silvermine. Most property was quickly acquired. However, Lewis B. Lapham, one of New Canaan's wealthiest citizens, refused to part with a 150-acre tract. Lapham died in 1934, upon which his heirs too refused to sell the property unless an old oak on the land was spared. When the roadway was built, it had to make a slight bend to avoid the "Lapham Oak."

Robert Hurley, commissioner of public works, condemned the road as being unsafely close to the tree, and he was probably right. The first fatality on the Merritt happened on August 7, 1939, when a Brooklyn man fell asleep at the wheel and hit the tree. The old oak was subsequently removed in February 1940.<sup>4</sup> Controversy also arose over draining Raymond's pond, a local

---

<sup>3</sup>"Important Dates in the History of New Canaan."

<sup>4</sup>"Highway Surveyors Have Gone Through Talmadge Hill District," New Canaan Advertiser, 2 March 1932, p. 1.

"Lewis B. Lapham Doesn't Want to Sell to State," New Canaan Advertiser, 23 November 1933, p. 2.

"150 Acres Transferred to State, Lapham Only One Left," New Canaan Advertiser, 27 December 1934, p. 1.

"Lapham Estate Finally Bought, Last Link Needed," New Canaan Advertiser, 25 June 1936, p. 1.

"Brooklyn Man Dies in Crash On Merritt Parkway When Car Hits Famous Oak Tree," New Canaan Advertiser, 10 August 1939, p. 1.

"Famous Oak Tree Removed Saturday," New Canaan Advertiser, 1 February 1940, p. 1.

recreational spot, for the roadbed, but unlike the Lapham Oak, sentiment did not prevail to save the pond.<sup>5</sup> Despite initial problems, the parkway would ultimately help to make New Canaan a prosperous residential community.

### BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Old Stamford Road/Route 106 begins at Lapham Road just north of the Merritt in the Talmadge Hill neighborhood and proceeds south to the Norwalk town line where the road is called Hoyt Street. The Paul Bacco Construction Company of Stamford, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from Ponus Ridge Road to South Avenue/Route 124, in New Canaan (ConnDot project #180-46). While the Old Stamford Road/Route 106 Bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the Paul Bacco Construction Company of Stamford, CT (ConnDot project #180-40).<sup>6</sup> The bridge cost \$37,823 and was completed in 1939. The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from Wire Mill Road, in Stamford, to Lapham Avenue, in New Canaan. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project# 180-93). In 1992, all loose and spalling concrete

---

<sup>5</sup>"Merritt will Drain Raymond's Pond," New Canaan Advertiser, 3 September 1936, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

Merritt Parkway, Old Stamford Road/Route 106  
Bridge  
HAER No. CT-82 (page 5)

was removed from the Old Stamford Road/Route 106 Bridge, it was then patched (ConnDot #173-170).<sup>7</sup>

### BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Old Stamford Road Bridge is a single-span, reinforced- concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame bridge carrying the Merritt Parkway. Parallel wing walls form the approach for the overpass. The rigid-frame design allows the engineer to decrease the structural material at the center of the span, thus forming an arched opening. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.)

The vertical emphasis of the Art Deco style is displayed on this bridge with prominent pylons and grooves in the railing and coping band. The pylons feature a tall rectangular tower, with three grooves the entire height of the face, flanked by quarter round posts as high as the coping band. The coping band is scored three times every few feet along the bridge span. The solid railing has recessed panels between large square posts. The sides of the post and the panel at the posts are scored three times.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Company, 1881.
- King, Mary Louise. The Making of Main Street. New Canaan: New Canaan Historical Society, 1971.
- King, Mary Louise. "New Canaan and the Merritt Parkway." New Canaan Historical Society Annual XI (1990-91).

---

<sup>7</sup>Old Stamford/Route 106 Bridge, DOT #709; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

New Canaan Advertiser. 1932-1940.

- . "Important Dates in the History of New Canaan." Pamphlet, New Canaan Historical Society, 1976.
- . Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.
- . Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.